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**DEFENDANT ARRESTED IN
IDENTITY THEFT AND CREDIT CARD FRAUD SCAM
EXCEEDING \$450,000 IN POTENTIAL LOSSES**

SACRAMENTO—United States Attorney John K. Vincent announced today that ASTONIA RONNIECE WICKS, 25, of Sacramento, was arrested this morning. On August 23, 2001, a federal grand jury returned a two count indictment charging ASTONIA RONNIECE WICKS, her stepmother, PHAEDRA OMEGA WICKS, 38, and her father, ARTHUR RAY WICKS, 47, all of Sacramento, with conspiracy to transfer or use a means of identification of another person with the intent to commit another unlawful activity (more commonly known as "identity theft") and conspiracy to use and traffic in unauthorized credit cards (more commonly known as "credit card fraud"). That indictment was unsealed with the arrest of ASTONIA WICKS.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Michael J. Malecek, who is prosecuting the case, the indictment alleges that the defendants obtained personal information such as birth dates and social security numbers from true individuals and used that information to open numerous credit card accounts and credit accounts at merchants. Defendants are alleged to have obtained individuals' personal information from at least four different sources: (1) rental applications obtained from an apartment complex where defendant ARTHUR RAY WICKS was employed as a maintenance

technician; (2) a single page of a Cal Trans employee roster; (3) stolen mail material; and (4) a web-site that collects and publishes individuals' social security numbers that have been published elsewhere. Using this stolen personal information, defendants are alleged to have obtained over \$300,000 in credit from credit card companies and merchants and to have actually received over \$100,000 in goods and services.

The charges are only allegations and the defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

If convicted, the maximum penalty under federal law for each offense of conspiracy to commit identity theft is 15 years, for each offense of conspiracy to commit credit card fraud is 7 ½ years.

ASTONIA WICKS will appear on the magistrate's 2:00 o'clock calendar for her initial appearance. PHAEDRA WICKS and ARTHUR WICKS will be scheduled to appear on the indictment in the next few weeks.

This case is the product of an extensive/joint investigation by the United States Postal Inspection Service and the Sacramento Valley High Tech Crimes Task Force.

Several government web-sites provide additional information about identity theft crimes including how to document and report such crimes to law enforcement:

www.consumer.gov/idtheft/

www.usdoj.gov/criminal/fraud/idtheft.html

www.usps.gov/postalinspectors/fraud/IdentityTheft.htm

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